

Barbarians at the Gateⁱ

Tom: earlier this month, you replied to my concerns about “spread the wealth around” with your opinion given as follows:

In my oh so humble opinion, we definitely need a serious redistribution of wealth. We've seen the number of people in the middle class decrease while the poor have increased and more and more wealth is concentrated among a few very rich. This is exactly the phenomenon that spelled doom for the Romans. Wealth becomes more and more concentrated in a few hands at the expense of the masses. If McCain wins and more and more people are poor and without health care, etc., violence will increase, public schools will go down the tubes, the American dream will vanish, and hello revolution and civil war.

Is that what rich fat cats who bank roll the McCain lies about Obama want? Come on! Ties to terrorists? He's a Muslim because of his middle name? How stupid are we? If we don't change course soon, this country is headed for a revolution that's going to be ugly for us all.

I want to provide a response. I know it would be better in a dialogue or discourse, however let me at least present a few of my reactions.

Redistribution of wealth equates to socialism. And yes, we have some of that now: we pay a negative income tax to people at the bottom, and we heavily tax those at the top of the income ladder. We have numerous welfare programs. You want *more* distribution of wealth? Tell me where socialism has worked – one can certainly point to places where capitalism has even overcome communism – Russia and China are two huge examples.

The overall theme of your response appears to be that if we allow more poor people to exist, then we are asking for revolution. “Poor” is such a subjective term, however I would interpret this to mean folks who don’t have (or have considerable trouble with obtaining) the basic needs of food and shelter. Do you think that just giving money to people gets them out of this “poor” category? Only if the money is given forever, throughout their lives. That is a welfare state, and to some degree, we have that in this country now. Have you seen any of the statistics that after the welfare rolls were purged during the Reagan administration that people actually went out and got jobs? That’s how people can stop “being” poor, not by waiting around for their government handouts during what should be their productive years.

I would not agree that increase of poor, and wealth at the top, was what spelled doom for the Romans. I would argue that it was, if you want to put a word on it, apathy – apathy coupled with, or even brought on by, the excesses of the welfare state. Here’s what [Wikipedia.com](#) says:

ⁱ From MBlackledge’s blog as posted on 10/20/2008 Wordpress.blog by Michael A. Blackledge
<http://mblackledge.wordpress.com/2008/10/20/>

The historian [Vegetius](#) theorized, and has recently been supported by the historian [Arthur Ferrill](#), that the Roman Empire – particularly the military – declined partially as a result of an influx of Germanic mercenaries into the ranks of the legions. This "Germanization" and the resultant cultural dilution or "barbarization", led to lethargy, complacency and loyalty to the Roman commanders, instead of the Roman government, among the legions and a surge in decadence amongst Roman citizenry.

To me, a better example of poor causing a revolution is the example of the French Revolution of 1789, however there the "rich" were indeed the ruling class and the "poor" had no say in their government.

Perhaps you would argue that wealth causes decadence. I can point to numerous cases of wealthy people working hard – some are even Democrats! However, there is a more important point here. Your response appears to imply that people are poor or middle class or rich essentially throughout their lives, and that those are their permanent classes (thus the concern of Republicans that Obama is encouraging this 'class warfare.') However, if you think about it, you will see that (for examples) your in-laws the Elders, and the Genonis, and the Ganongs, and the Blackledges all started as "poor" – we were all making about \$220 a month, and we all had just about enough to get by on as we had babies and young careers. You state that if McCain were elected, the American dream will vanish – well, we all lived that [American Dream](#). We all worked hard and improved our status a little each year as we rose through the ranks of the military and then into the [military-industrial complex](#), and voila! We became RICH!(at least by Obama's yardstick). This IS the American Dream!

What we did then can still be done today: moving from poor to rich by applying oneself: working your way through college as Paul did at Montana State, or applying for an appointment to a service academy as Tom and Gary and I did. Giving money to poor people, or furthering the welfare state, is very much in opposition to what the American Dream is all about. Giving people 110% mortgage loans with no money down and no proof of the ability to repay the loan may be the dream of some liberal Democrats but it is not the American Dream. It is a blueprint for the Fall of the America-We-Know-And-Love.

It appears at [this juncture](#) that you will get your dream, in that [Barack Obama](#) will indeed be the 44th President of our United States. I know he is articulate, I accept he is intelligent, I concede that he has displayed superior political attributes to include excellent organizational skills. I sincerely hope he surrounds himself with good advisers and governs wisely – wisely in encouraging what *facilitates* the American Dream, not what undermines it with handouts under the guise of "economic justice."

Thanks for your consideration. Please provide your response by clicking on "comments" below.

Tom, you responded:

Mike, I finally have at least a little time to respond to your reply....you know how life with a one-year-old goes! Everything I say is with lots of respect for you personally. I do have a huge problem, however, with wealthy people who refuse to realize that if they don't take care of others, the less fortunate people, they are going to bring down the whole ship... Here are a couple things I wanted to say before but didn't have time. First, "Joe the Plumber," like Palin, was not fully vetted before McCain mentioned him in the last debate. Turns out that not only does the real Joe (Samuel J. Wurzelbacher) have a lien against him for not paying taxes, he doesn't even have a plumber's or contractor's license, and he admitted to Katie Couric that he actually has no plans to buy the proposed business and enter the higher tax bracket (>\$250,000) he mentioned to Obama on the campaign trail. So why would he be so opposed to a guy becoming president who is going to lower his taxes and put more money in his pocket? I think he gave us an indication of why, when he said to Couric that Obama's remarks on his tax policy were like a "tapdance...almost as good as Sammy Davis Jr." Anyway, regarding "socialism" and the "redistribution of wealth," to me it's just so typical of Republicans to try to scare people into submission. Of course Obama is not a socialist. When Joe approached him, Obama's response was: "I do believe that for folks like me who have worked hard but frankly also been lucky, I don't mind paying just a little bit more than the waitress who I just met over there. She can barely pay the rent. And I think that when you spread the wealth around, it's good for everyone." I think that response is great. We're not talking about making rich people poor and poor people rich. We're talking about a little more equity. I challenge you to find a sane economist who would disagree with Adam Smith, the esteemed capitalist, who wrote: "It is not very unreasonable that the rich should contribute to the public expense, not only in proportion to their revenue, but something more than in that proportion." Finally, it is a fact that during the past eight years of Bush, the gap between America's richest and the rest has increased dramatically. The very rich have become extremely rich and the middle class and poor have seen their incomes stagnate or drop slightly. The average income for plumbers in 2007 was \$47,000.

Sure, go ahead and add my comments. They were not very well thought out, but I hope they will generate some discussion. I also have been thinking and reading a lot about why some people are conservative and others liberal. What's the basic mind set, etc? I think I finally found some answers. I'll write to you about them when I have time.

Tom, your comments have indeed generated some discussion, as you can see from the above such as those of Dick Blide.

The Joe the Plumber incident is most telling in this situation. No, he doesn't have a license, however (like most plumbers) he works under a Master Plumber. {Joe is working on his own Master Plumber license and is close.) But the point is what he got Obama to say, which you quoted. Even more telling is the interview with Obama from seven years ago which is getting quite a bit of play, the one in which he notes the "flaw" in the constitution. Again he is pushing for the concept of economic redistribution (which I realize you do not oppose.) This is what worries be about the man: we do not know his core values, whatever they may be - and yet people are so eager for this messianic figure that they are willing to accept him without questioning him sufficiently. Yes, the campaign lacks vetting - however John McCain stands as a defender of the country. I do not see Barack Obama in that light.

Reply